

Revised 10/02

I. FOOD ALERT SYSTEM

PURPOSE:

This Instruction establishes the Food Alert System procedures for communicating effectively and quickly with all recipient agencies of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) donated foods or Child Nutrition (CN) labeled products whenever there is an urgent concern about the safety, wholesome, or condition of these foods.

BACKGROUND:

The Food Alert System is a communication system designed to relay information as quickly and accurately as possible to appropriate program personnel in FNS Headquarters and Regional Office; State Distributing Agencies (who will serve as the State Emergency coordinator(s); administering State Agencies for Child Nutrition Programs, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program; local recipient agencies; the Executive Board of the American School Food Service Associations; and the National Association of State Agencies for Food Distribution.

The Food Alert System will only be used for emergency health hazard situations. Situation not posing a serious potential health hazard should be handled in accordance with FNS Instruction 710-1, Condition Inspection of Foods After Delivery.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

A. Food Distribution Division (FDD) shall:

1. Designate a National Office Emergency Coordinator and alternate(s) to handle incoming and outgoing information about the potentially hazardous situation. The Coordinator will maintain a current list of all appropriate Headquarters and Regional Office Program contacts.
2. Immediately notify FNS Regional Food Distribution Program Directors via Computerized Message Transmission (COMET) of the

potential hazard. See subparagraph 5, below, for information to be provided in notification.

3. Immediately provide copies of the information listed under subparagraph 5, below, to appropriate Headquarters Program Divisions.
3. Send telegrams regarding the emergency when appropriate to the Executive Board of the American School Food Service Association and National Association of State Agencies for Food Distribution. The telegram shall also inform these associations that Distributing Agencies have been notified of the emergency notification system shall provide information to the local recipient agencies. See subparagraph 5, below, for additional information to be provided in telegram.
5. Provide the following information via COMET and/or telegram when notifying the offices listed in subparagraphs 2, 3, and 4 above, about the potential hazard.
 - a. The state "THIS IS A FOOD ALERT". A potential health hazard has been discovered. An immediate "hold" must be placed on all products covered by this ALERT, at all known or suspected locations, until advice is received on proper disposition.
 - b. A brief explanation of the suspected nature or cause of problem.
 - c. Whether the product involved in the ALERT is an USDA donated commodity or a CN labeled product.
 - d. The name of the product, contract, and/or plant number, can codes (if appropriate and available), Delivery Order Number, if known, and any other available information that will help identify the product.

B. Regional Office shall:

1. Immediately upon receipt of the ALERT, telephone appropriate State Distributing Agency Emergency Coordinators, providing all of the information in paragraph A 5, above. Confirm all telephone messages via COMET or telegram.
2. Immediately notify appropriate Regional Office program personnel regarding the ALERT.
3. Designate a Regional Office Emergency Coordinator and alternate(s) to handle incoming and outgoing information about the potentially hazardous situation.
4. Promptly relay information submitted by the State Distributing Agency Emergency Coordinator to FDD.
4. At least annually, review State Distributing Agency plans for local emergency notification systems.

C. State Distributing Agency Emergency Coordinator shall:

1. Work with the appropriate State Agencies to appoint Emergency Coordinator(s) within each State who will establish and maintain their own emergency notification system to local agencies, and to relay information to all responsible officials with the State.
2. Designate up to four alternate Emergency Coordinators for each State.
3. Develop, maintain, and transmit to the Regional Office a current and accurate file of Emergency Coordinators and alternates, which include:
 - a. Name;
 - b. Title;
 - c. Business address and telephone number; and
 - d. Home address and telephone number.

4. Promptly relay to the Regional Office information provided by local agencies in connection with the ALERT.

OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET APPROVAL:

The reporting and/or recordkeeping requirements contained herein have been approved by the Office of Management and Budget in accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980.

COMMODITY COMPLAINTS:

1. Who should use this hotline?

This hotline should be used by eligible program recipients participating in the following USDA Food Distribution Programs:

[Child Nutrition Commodity Support](#). Includes commodity support for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

2. If I participate in a program that receives USDA commodities through one of the Food Distribution Programs and I want to file a complaint about a particular product, whom should I call?

To file a complaint about a particular USDA product, you may do one of the following:

- Call USDA's Commodity Complaint Hotline on our toll-free number at **1-800-446-6991**; or
- Email us at usda-fns-commoditycomplaints@fns.usda.gov; or
- Fax a written copy of the complaint to us at (703) 305-2420

Note: For hearing impaired personnel, the hotline may be contacted by first dialing the local Teletype (TTY) Relay Service in your State. Then you should have the Relay Operator dial the 1-800 number; Or if you wish, you can Email Us at the address given above.

3. What If I Have A Complaint About A USDA Donated Food That Arrives In A Commercial Label?

This school year, manufacturers that produce foods for USDA, which are distributed through the commodity distribution programs to schools and other outlets, will have the option of using their own commercial label, or they can continue to use the traditional USDA labels. This will mean that you may receive USDA donated foods in a label that is the same as those, which you have purchased commercially. For example, your USDA donated green beans may come in a Del Monte label.

When a school has a complaint about a product that is received in a commercial label, you, have the option of contacting the company directly to request a

resolution to your problem. This may be the easiest option for you, particularly if you have purchased other foods from this manufacturer and already have a relationship established with the company. There is no reason that you should not contact the manufacturers directly when your product arrives in a commercial label and you know how to reach them.

However, if the product is in the traditional USDA label, or if you would prefer to request USDA to resolve the problem, you may continue to send your complaints to us to request a resolution. Send them directly to the Food Distribution Division in one of the ways listed below:

- Toll-Free Commodity Complaint Hotline: 1-800-446-6991
- Email: USDA-FNS-CommodityComplaints@FNS.USDA.GOV
- Fax (703) 305-1410 or (703) 305-2420, or
- Regular mail: US Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Food Distribution Division, 3101 Park Center Drive, Alexandria, VA 22302

To process your complaint more quickly, you should provide the following information:

- A description of the problem
- Date the product was received
- Location of the product
- How much product is involved
- Contract number (may be stenciled on the outer carton)
- Delivery order number (D/O) Available on the Notice of Arrival form (KY-FD-2)

If you are seeking a replacement, you should keep the product separated from other products until you have been notified what to do with it.

4. What information will the customer service representative need to know in order to resolve my commodity complaint more quickly?

When placing a call to the USDA Commodity Complaint Hotline or Emailing us, it would be very helpful if you could provide the following information:

- The name of the product and the USDA Commodity Code if known, (e.g., Canned Beef - A-502). Available on the Notice of Arrival form (KY-FD-2)
- The nature of the problem and whether anyone reported feeling sick from consuming the product.
- The extent of the problem (e.g., the number of cases, pounds, truckloads, etc.).
- The specific circumstances involved (e.g., I received the damaged canned products two months ago but the case they were packed in was located in the middle of a pallet that could not be seen until it was opened by the school.

Or the temperature in the vendor's truck was 40 degrees when the discolored frozen products were delivered.

- Each location where the product is being stored.
- Delivery order information including: date product received, contract number, notice of delivery number, lot number, and can codes (if applicable).
- In some instances, photographs of the damaged product might be helpful. Our customer service representative will discuss it with you when you call.

Hotline/Email Tip: Even if you do not have all of the information listed above, please call the Hotline or Email USDA anyway so that one of their customer service representatives can assist you. Well-trained customer service representatives man the Hotline and are ready to help resolve your complaints as quickly as possible.

5. What time can I call the hotline?

Their core business hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. eastern standard time (EST).

Note: If you call the hotline during non-business hours, or if no one is available at the time you call during regular business hours, please leave your name, telephone number and a brief message on our voice mail system. Upon return, a commodity complaint specialist will promptly return your call.

If, however, a complaint is considered urgent or serious and you want to report it after 5 p.m. (EST), we suggest that you leave a voice mail message on the toll-free 1-800 hotline number (or [Email](#) them) and then contact our office and the local health department as appropriate.